

Argus 2002



Story of the Argus

The Argus was, in Greek mythology, the loyal servant of Hera. With one hundred eyes that slept in turns so that it was always awake, Hera left him to guard Io, a lover of Zeus that had been turned into a heifer to protect her from Hera's wrath. Zeus, infuriated, sent Hermes to free Io, and using his magical lyre, Hermes lulled the Argus to sleep and killed it.

To honor her dead servant, Hera placed the eyes of the Argus on the feathers of the peacock.

Now, the Argus has become the patron and title of Northwestern State University's campus art and literary magazine, symbolizing the many differing views of the readers, like the hundred eyes of the peacock's tail.

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Early in our history, the fine arts were often presented with the accompaniment of lute or whistle, harp or mandolin. The bard did not *simply read* his poetry; he sang it. The minstrel did not only tell a story; he played it.

The *Argus 2001* staff still feels that the arts cannot be properly appreciated without the mood set by music. Music brings to surface emotions and memories that enhance those feelings already brought up by a painting, by a poem, by a finely written line of prose: hence, our CD.

There are a number of people outside the staff who greatly assisted us in the printing of both our CD and our magazine, and we would like to send out our thanks to them. Special thanks to Dr. Julie Kane and Dr. Helaine Razovsky for their help advising and giving us the occasional prodding to meet deadlines. We would also like to thank our judges, Dr. Frank Schicketanz, Mr. David Caudle, Dr. Joe Hardin, Mr. Thomas Reynolds, Mr. Brooks Defee, Mr. Clyde Downs, and Mr. Michael Yankowski. Also, we would like to thank Dr. Rocky Colavito and Mrs. Bobby Jackson. Lastly, we would like to thank the printers, Mr. And Mrs. Charlie and Beth Mann; without them, you wouldn't be reading this.

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Two eyes blink for a few seconds in groggy succession. Something had wrested her from sleep's downy cradle. Two miniature hands rub the last traces of the cradle's spider webs from the corners of those eyes. She recognizes the sound of the Siren's call as it permeates her room. Two feet struggle to free themselves of the blanket shackles holding her prisoner. She slips out of her bed, a wispy shadow in the midnight room. The girl has no need for light; she knows where she is, and she knows precisely where the door lies. Two bare feet tread mutely on thick carpet. She grasps the knob that reflects the moon's glow. As she opens the door, brilliant golden light cascades across the room like a volcano's molten lava flow.

As her eyes adjust to the light, she can see a long hallway stretching before her, and at the other end she glimpses two radiant figures as they move around the large room at the end of the miles of corridor. The girl, fairy-like in her movements, journeys the length of the hall. Sometimes she creeps forward an inch at a time. Sometimes she stretches her slender legs as far as she can. Carefully, oh so carefully, she negotiates the minefield of creaking floorboards in an attempt to avoid detection. The fingers of her left hand trail a well-worn path the length of the corridor wall. The familiar paint bumps and closet door coolness greet their old friend as she passes. When the cat's tongue roughness of the fireplace hails her touch, she stops to absorb the familiar mesmerizing scene before her.

An odd silhouette is outlined before the living room lamps. As the shadow flows away from the light, it melts away to reveal two people with loving arms around each other. Both appear to glow in their beautiful clothing. The tall, slender man's ebony suit compliments the dark, petite woman's ankle-length black dress as it swirls and sways around her legs, as well as his. The two smiling figures appear not to notice their young observer in her faded pink pajamas. The graceful pair flow around the room, turning and spinning, in a beautiful dance marked by the Siren's call. The large speakers magnify the sound of the orchestra trapped within the stereo.

The little urchin slips around the edge of the room. She climbs over the furniture mountains created by the couple pushing back tables and couches in order to clear their dance floor. Upon reaching her goal, her corner of an overstuffed, blue velvet couch, she curls up against the armrest, her chin on thin arms. She watches in utter captivation as the dancers speed up and slow down in their relentless response to song after song. Finally, the dark lady needs to rest; her tired feet are begging her to be released from their dainty high-heeled captors.

The girl moves for the first time since she settled in her corner. She sits up and the man turns as if he had not seen her there before. As always, the gentleman beckons, and he is rewarded with the girl's sunrise smile. She scrambles to reach his side; her heart drumrolls in excited anticipation.

She tilts her head up to meet his crystal chameleon eyes that mirror her own. The minute trails that reside around each of his eyes deepen and multiply with his answering smile. Two eyes reduce to slivers as her smile spreads to engulf her face. Two hands reach up; her right hand is swallowed by his cracked leather hand, and her left arm stretches upward to allow that hand a resting place on his arm. That is as close to the spot on his shoulder the petite lady's hand had claimed as her young body could reach. Two tiny feet step delicately up onto the man's sparkling shoes like a new fawn stepping into a clearing. The pair stand poised in anticipation.

The Siren calls. The offset pair flow around the room, turning and spinning, in a beautiful dance very different from that of the previous dancers. The incongruity of sophisticated black suit paired with infantile carnation sleepwear is strangely warming, like a child's plastic sippy cup placed adjacent a long-stemmed wine glass in a formal holiday table setting. The dancers continue, and just as the ripples in a pond that a pebble creates spiral out, their laughter resonates away from them in waves until the room reverberates with it.

The fairy-child tires, and it is the dark lady's turn to dance once more. The gentleman never tires; his love for his skill overrides his body's fatigue. The girl resumes her position on her couch, and she watches through lead eyelids the two people she loves the most.

Later, the dancers will carry her back to her bed, and she will awaken in the morning with the night's dream quality memory to store with the other memories she cherishes.

People often ask me where I learned to dance. I always tell them, "At home. My Daddy taught me." I cannot recall the first time I danced with him. Those late nights with my parents were as much a part of my life as cartoons and Barbie dolls. Eventually, I will share nights like those with my own children. The love and laughter will echo without fading through my memory and dreams for the rest of my life.





Joseph Brakhage : A Ballad of Love and Hate

Across the pond,
 a dinosaur
saw a blushing smurf
 and said
"I hate thee so
 o little smurf
and bid thee leave
 my land."

The smurf said, "No,"
 and failed to go
thus tried
 the dino's hand;
The dyne, he slammed
 the speaking door
and crept
 to higher land.

In night he worked
 in day he hid
his ire thus
 fueled his plan
to rally those of
 dino kind
'gainst those
 of smurfish brand.

The smurfs they go
 's though deaf and blind
t' what's in
 the dinos' hand
And such's their way
 until the day
The D's act on
 Their plan.

 the smurfish land.

Thus fiery rocks
 flew thither
and smurfs
 knew not their fate
until the plans
 were in the air
and it was much
 too late.

The crash
 the crush
the falling 'crete
 the terror
the horror
 the running feet
Apré's all these
 The smurfs entreat
O why
 O why?
O why-ing
 so many dead
and all the more
 are dying
O dying
 O dying.

Whither from here
 the smurfs know not
though the grand smurf
 has a plan
to guard against
 threatn'ing dinosaurs
and protect

Krista Parker

Behind Closed Doors

Nobody knows what goes on behind closed doors
when you're under the blanket, hidden from the light
and when you're brushing your teeth, you listen to the
sound of the water
running
when you're running, you listen to the sound of your heart
beating
Your father is beating the life right out of you
and when you're no longer yourself, who are you, when in
the beginning, you
were just a little girl without any fears because you never
knew what fear was
When you're huddled in a corner with the lights out, you're
no longer scared
of the darkness or being alone
but when you hear the doorknob turning, the tears begin to
fill your eyes and
you wipe them away before he takes a look at you looking
down at the floor,
trying to escape the pain
Dreaming of everything beautiful, but the only thing beau-
tiful to you is not
being hurt
and when the bruises finally heal and the blood dries, you
dry your tears and
look away as he walks away leaving you vulnerable and dead
inside
and inside the small empty house
nobody knows what goes on behind closed doors except for you



Krista Parker:

Cities F

a
l
l
i
n
g

That's where she got married
the place with the steeple
The same place she was buried
with all the people
with darkness closing in on all four sides
The dropping of bricks and the loud banging of buildings
falling
bells ringing, it feels like the end
and in the wind, you can hear her calling
sadness is in her voice because she's alone and cold
We can learn a thing or two from the millions of those who
have died
and those who have saved our lives

Shane Erath: The Arctic's Brave Torchbearer

Flying above this great iron bird,
and all down below me, no house or home;
just a single boat's beacon,
it sails on alone.

A cold, icy wasteland, a desert of snow;
nothing could live where nothing can grow;
no sign of man down there, toiling below,
except yonder beacon, a harsh orange glow.

I bow to the sailor upon that lone ship;
that eyesore and blight, like a sore, a rip.
How brave such a man, when an eyestrain away
he sees only snow, a cold, dreary day;
except yonder beacon, blazing away.



Missy Dupreast

They

Wandering the face of the earth long ago was a tribe called Modipacç. Together the tribe lived as a family, each partaking in the day's chores and play. Their responsibilities consisted of whatever it took to maintain survival, and their only possessions were those things that the tribe was able to carry. No one ever went hungry because his fellow tribesmen were always there to help. Every member of the tribe lived in harmony with each other and with the world around them.

One fall, as the sun raised her head to shine the first ray of light across the prairies, the hunters of Modipacç set out into the woods to gather the day's food. They, still too young to hunt alone, accompanied Aequus, an older and much wiser hunter in the tribe. Together the two hunters went, cutting their way through thickets and briars, until they reached a tall pine. Aequus stopped and pointed to the ground next to the pine, and They sat down. He knew exactly what Aequus wanted him to do, and neither of them wanted to jeopardize their hunt with petty words.

The two hunters sat motionless and let their ears and their eyes roam the woods. They had always been excited about hunting trips, as it was still quite new to him. Often he would let his mind wander, causing him the loss of a few good shots. Early that morning, though, Aequus meditated with him. When the two were done Aequus placed his hands on They's shoulders and said, "We will have a good hunt today."

Both of the hunters were intensely focused and when a twig snapped to their left, their heads popped eagerly in that direction. They could feel his heart pounding in his throat as he saw a beautiful doe through the trees. He was startled at the touch of Aequus's hand on his shoulder, but he did not flinch. He knew what Aequus wanted him to do.

They slowly and cautiously pulled an arrow from his pouch and readied his bow. All was silent and the doe stood still unaware.

They drew back his arrow and tried to aim. His heart was beating too fast; his anxiety was dancing all throughout his body. They took a deep breath, locked his arms into the perfect aim, and . . .

The body of the doe fell to the ground, and They jumped up and screamed in glory. He ran to the dead animal and began dancing around its body. Aequus approached the doe and scowled at They's foolish behavior. They immediately stopped dancing around but could not withhold his prideful smile.

Aequus congratulated They on his kill but added, "One must not be too proud. This kill is necessary for the survival of our people." Aequus stood for a brief moment in silence and then looked at They. "When I was your age, or perhaps a bit younger, there was a hunter in our tribe who sought too much for himself and not enough for others. He tried to take everything for himself, and this caused our people to go hungry and grow ill from the cold while he stayed fat and warm beneath his pile of possessions."

"What happened to him?" asked They.

"He died alone, beneath his things. He had betrayed all of his brothers and sisters of the tribe. He withdrew from his family and reached for control over possessions. He failed, though. The tribe was too strong to be influenced by his greed. The tribe moved on and he died with an armful of worthless rubbish, but when you are dead, even that is empty-handed. We have what we have and we do what we do for the good of the tribe." Aequus paused and said, "Let us walk back in silence to show our respect for nature's creatures."

The two hunters picked up the doe and carried it back to where the tribe had camped the night before. They heard what Aequus had said but he did not truly understand. He walked back into the camp a changed boy. He had killed his first game. He had become a man.

They could hardly contain himself as the feast was being prepared. He paced while anticipating the taste of his first blood. When the meal was ready, he was the first to grab a chunk of meat from that healthy doe, but he did not eat right away. He held the meat for a second, letting his mouth water and his taste buds perk. He slowly sank his teeth into the meat, savoring every juicy morsel. When his piece had been

around for another piece, but none remained. They grew very upset over this. "I killed the doe; why can't I have as much of it as I want?" he thought. He stood begrudgingly and walked away through the prairie.

Since it was not yet dark, They decided to go back into the woods and kill his own food, for him alone. He made his way through the thickets, sat beneath a tall tree, and waited. Hours passed and the sun was beginning to rest her head for the evening, but They did not give up. He wanted his very own feast, not to be shared with anyone. Then, before him, stood another deer. They smiled as he readied his bow, knowing he was about to accomplish his goal. He shot his arrow and watched the animal's body fall. He wasted no time in gutting and cleaning the deer, for the evening's light would not last too much longer.

They cleared a small area there in the woods and built a fire. He cut himself a piece of deer meat and held it over the fire. He ate heartily, well beyond his fill. This young hunter failed to realize that no matter how mighty a hunter may be, he can still not eat an entire deer by himself. They stood and staggered his way back to the tribe, leaving the uneaten meat and remains there to rot.

Winter soon came, and illness fell across the tribe. Many were unable to hunt or gather food, so the survival of the tribe rested on the shoulders of a certain few. And, being a strapping young hunter, They was one of those few who had the strength to carry them through the cold. As They gathered his gear and set out for the woods, he became very agitated that he had to carry the weight of so many others of the tribe. "Why do I have to do this?" he thought as he cut his way through briars. Beyond the briars, They came to a relatively clear area and squatted next to a tree. He wrapped his arms around his knees and put his face in his hands to warm his body, but he was still too cold to keep still. He fidgeted this way and that, with his mind scattered. Suddenly, They was startled at the sight of a deer. After nearly falling over, he unraveled himself and immediately grabbed an arrow. This commotion, however,

frightened the deer, and it had begun running away just as They was drawing his bow.

The deer fell to the ground, and They stood paralyzed. He blinked his eyes to make sure he wasn't imagining things, but the deer's body was there on the ground. They looked down into his hands, which still held his unreleased arrow. "Who killed that deer?" he thought.

They then heard someone through the trees. He looked and saw the figure of one of his tribesmen. It was Icquuras, a hunter three years They's younger. They ran up to the young hunter in rage. "What do you think you are doing?" he screamed. "I was aiming for that deer, and you shot it. That was my deer!"

"But, They," pleaded Icquuras, "I didn't know. . .and. . .Aequus says that what we kill is for the survival of the tribe. . .so. . .I didn't think it mattered."

"Didn't matter?" cried They, but he stopped himself. An idea had come upon him. Icquuras was rather young and his mind easily influenced. "I'll tell you what. That deer was supposed to be my kill. So, you give it to me, and I'll show you how it matters." They smiled and put his arm around the young hunter, and the two of them walked towards the deer.

"But I don't understand," said Icquuras .

"Don't worry; you will. Just don't say anything and watch. You'll learn a lot. Now, help me carry this thing."

The two hunters carried their kill back to the tribe, but this return was far different than that of any other hunting excursion. They carried the deer to center of the camp and threw it down onto the ground. "Listen, everyone!" he screamed and the tribe began to gather around.

"I killed this deer," proclaimed They with an unfamiliar confidence. "You eat because I bring you food. But do I ever get anything in return? No. Well, I'm going to get something in return this time. No one can have any of this meat unless they give me something for it."

The people of the tribe stood in utter shock. Through the congregation Aequus called out from his pallet of skins and hides

where he had been lying ill. "Young They," he called, straining his weak voice, "one must not want too much. We kill out of necessity, not out of greed."

"I think you're sick, old man," They said with a sinister smile. At these words tears formed in Aequus's eyes, and he laid back down onto his pallet completely powerless. He lay there terrified of what was going to happen to his people.

"If you are one of these sick old hunters," They continued, "you will get food in exchange for your weapons. If you have set up your tents near the creek, move. That land will be your payment for food."

"But They," said a woman from the crowd, "that land is not ours to give."

"Why not?" he responded, and before anyone could counter his remark, he continued his speech. As for the others, bring me what you have. If I am not satisfied with your possessions, you can perform services for me." They sighed deeply and looked out among his tribesmen. "You see? Everybody will get to eat and I will get rewarded for my efforts."

The tribesmen really had no choice. None of the other young hunters had been successful, and no one else was well enough to put forth the effort. Everyone sadly went into their tents and, one by one, came to present their payments to They, who stood supervising those moving their tents away from the creek. With surrender in their eyes, the young hunters placed their weapons before They and were handed a piece of meat.

"But this is so small," said one of the boys.

"But look what you gave me. One dilapidated little bow and arrow. It's fair." With that, They pushed the boy aside and saw a woman standing before him with an arm full of bows and arrows and knives. "Where did you get these?" he asked.

"These belong to Aequus. He is not well enough to come here himself," answered the woman with a confident and determined air.

"Oh, really?" They retorted. "So you're his slave?"

"No, I am not."

"Well, you go and tell Aequis that if he wants food, he has to at least come and get it. I can't help him if he won't help himself." They waved his hand at the woman to brush her away. He felt like he owned the tribe. People were coming before him and offering him glorious gifts for a piece of the meat that he killed. But, when he snapped back into reality he saw the woman still standing there. He waved his hand at her again, but she did not move.

"He is very ill. He has done so much for you. Has he not taught you how to hunt?" They scowled at the woman as he threw a chunk of meat into her arms and waved her away.

Evening came and everyone in the tribe had eaten. They was very proud of himself, for he had no idea the amount of control he could have over the tribe by simply not sharing. He lay back among his newly collected things and thought about what could be done next. As he was meditating, Icquuras approached him.

"They," said the young hunter, "I don't understand what you have done. Everyone is sad."

"Everyone is sad simply because they're not used to this new idea yet. Look at all these things we got. We gave something to them, and they gave something to us. It all works out that way. Here, look," They said as he picked up an armful of weapons to give to Icquuras. "Take these, and the two of us will hunt again in the morning. We have all of the weapons, and the others will soon realize that it is much easier to let us get the food and let them pay for it." Icquuras took the weapons and left for his tent, and They smiled with gratification. He now had a partner. "That other man seemed to have a good idea, he just didn't have enough support," thought They. "I will succeed."

The next morning the two hunters left for the woods and brought back their game. The tribe gathered around them pleading for them to share. "We have no more weapons," called one hunter from the crowd.

"You don't necessarily have to pay with weapons," said They. "I will gladly take your tents." With this declaration the crowd grew frantic.

"But where will we sleep?"

"You can't do that!"

"We'll die in this cold."

"Now, now," said *They* in an effort to calm his people.

"I understand your concern, so I will work with you on this. If you would like to stay in your tent, stay, but if you want to eat, that tent you are sleeping in and the earth that it sits upon belongs to me. You can stay in my tent and on my land if you perform services for me."

The people of the tribe were shocked. No one had ever owned land before. The earth had always been seen as one big home shared by all of its creatures. But now, one creature has declared his authority over all of his brothers and sisters and has stolen from the very earth that has provided for him since his birth.

One young woman approached *They* with her head sunken and said, "I have nothing but a single tent at the edge of the camp. What must I do to eat?"

"You mustn't be sad," replied *They*. "It is not as horrible as you may think. I will give you food for your tent and the land it sits upon. Then, I will let you stay in that tent if you cook for me."

The young woman nodded her head, and *They* gave her a piece of meat. Each of the tribesmen came to *They*, and he assigned jobs to each of them. By the end of the afternoon he had collected 27 servants: ten hunters, ten cooks, and seven fetchers of water. *They* sat and watched all of his servants eating their meals. Those who did not serve *They* did not eat.

As *They* smiled at his new accomplishment he heard his name being called through the camp. He stood and followed the sound to *Aequus's* tent. "*They*," he said, "I am not well. I cannot play this game that you are starting."

"Game?" started *They*. "This is not a game. This is fair; everyone is earning their keep."

"I fear you have forgotten what I have taught you, child."

"I am not a child! I have done more for this tribe than any of you old men. You are just to caught up in your ways too realize it, but you will."

"But you are disrupting nature."

They did not respond, but smirked and turned and walked away. Aequus lied on his pallet and cried. As he watched the tribe fall apart and his illness take over his body, he could feel the life being sucked from him. He had fought against this sickness, but it had defeated him. Aequus took one last look at his tribesmen, closed his eyes, and slept.

The entire Modipacç tribe gathered around Aequus's body and mourned in silence. They, too, approached to pay his respects, but his respects were quite minimal. He bowed and went directly into one of his many tents where he proceeded to devise his power-hungry plans. The tribe, disregarding his actions, began to construct a stretcher to carry Aequus to his burial. The men gathered limbs from nearby trees, and the women took the hides from Aequus's pallet. This simple act was a ceremony in itself to celebrate the natural circles of life and death. This ceremony in particular, though, was the last of the Modipacç tribe.

As the tribesmen lifted Aequus's body onto the stretcher, They stepped out of his tent. "Where are you taking him?" he asked.

The tribesmen looked up at They, and one responded, "We were considering laying him to rest under the oak tree in the prairie."

"You can't do that. I own that land." The tribesmen were appalled. "Aequus gave it to me for a meal one night." No one knew what to think or say. Could Aequus have given that land to They? Surely he wouldn't, would he? But there was no arguing; They had the upper hand.

"May we have your permission to bury him there?" asked a young woman meekly.

"No," They said. "That is, unless you would like to bargain." The crowd was silent. They felt defeated and absolutely hopeless. Tears began to form in the eyes of some of the tribesmen, and others were shocked at his selfishness. But, with the best interests of Aequus in mind, the tribesmen suppressed their anger and listened to what They had to say.

"Well, I already have all of your weapons, so you're not really hunting anyway. So, I'll give you the oak tree in the prairie for the forests."

"All of the forests?" came a yell from the rustling crowd.

"All of the forests will be mine. I have hunters and cooks who have earned food and a tent. The others can buy their food and their tents with possessions or services. Your food will be hunted and cooked for you if you give payment to the owner of the land from which the animal was killed, the hunter, and the cook. Everyone is properly rewarded for his efforts. You take the oak and I take the forests. It all works out."

Too sorrowful to argue, the tribe agreed and proceeded to bury Aequus under the oak tree. The Modipacç tribe was no longer a brotherhood. Every tribesman had to answer to someone else to get a single meal; no more could he go into the woods and hunt for the good of all. Now, he had to wait for others to hunt and bribe them for food just to survive. No one was satisfied now that a price had been placed on those things normally done for the survival of a brotherhood. With the death of Aequus came a wave of greed, and the way of life known to the Modipacç tribe had dissipated.

After teaching Icquuras and other young members from the tribe, They eventually died, but his spirit and his message live on. His name is still well heard and said throughout the lands. Even in death They has secured faithful followers who hold his teachings as truth. They are everywhere.

The REAL Cause of the CIVIL WAR

Who'd ya mean
you don't mix
the Peanut Butter and
the Jelly!!



South's
position

The Sophisticated
do not stoop so as
to mix the, how do
you say, PB and J



North's
position

NO MIX

Eric Leday

Love on Earth

What is earth's love, save a delusion?
Immaturity of flesh adds a
Corrupt measure of confusion.

What is earth's endearment, but an illusion?
Man's flesh and woman's mind
Make this "love" hard to find.

Who is love, but Love Himself?
Love's rapport compares to naught

Though I search for her, nothing I find.
A force inside of me compels me
To continue, for Love's making, looking.

The Wise knoweth Love,
The earth knoweth not
To the noble can love be absent.

Will a wise man ever know
Why good women shun him?

Will a good woman ever know
Why wise men shun her?

Glenn Ward

A Ray of Light

"I had once believed that we were masters of our own fate—that we could mould our lives into any form we pleased. . . I had overcome deafness and blindness sufficiently to be happy, and I supposed that anyone could come out victorious if he threw himself valiantly into life's struggle. But as I went more and more about the country I learned that I had spoken with assurance on a subject I knew little about. . . I learned that the power to rise in this world is not within the reach of everyone." National hero Helen Keller gave this bleak but powerful quote earlier in the century. Although she could not hear or see this world as we do, she perceived the evil of oppression, the unjustness of destitution, the crime of poverty. I did not have the privilege of knowing Helen Keller, but I do know a person who embodies her ideals and has turned them into action. This man, the man sitting across from me, is Raymond Reynolds.

When Ray was seventeen, he donated his summer to charity work with Amnesty International. Although he had grown up in Louisiana himself, Lake Charles to be exact, Ray had no idea what he was in for. Ray described the scenes back to me, a surreal picture of these 1970s Deep South sugar plantations around Baton Rouge. "We went to these sugar plantations and found people, families of seven, living in dirt floor houses with no running water, no electricity, living in what you and I would call a lawnmower shed. These families were kept in perpetual debt," he explained to me, "by high rent to live in these shacks, high grocery prices at the plantation store, high medicine costs. . . which led second graders in these families to drop out of school to harvest sugarcane—to help their families: pay rent, eat a meal, survive. Without an education, these children could not break the cycle of poverty they were drowning in; it was Amnesty International's job to show these people this, to encourage them to get government help so they could keep their children in school." With jaw half-open in amazement I listened as he proceeded. "Our success rate was disappointing there; but I was changed forever, disillusioned, and knew I had to do something."

Not coming from a rich family himself, with a father that switched jobs several times to support his four children, Ray left home after he graduated to find a purpose, his purpose. After spending a brief three years in the military, Ray married Denise, his high school sweetheart, and returned to live in Lake Charles, Louisiana.

"Those first years married, were bad," Ray told me. "We lived in a stilt house, a two-room building down by the city dump. Whenever it rained heavy, our house would become infested with the rats escaping the water."

Ray took several odd jobs during this period, the best being a taxi cab driver. But then something unexpected happened, Denise got pregnant. With no medical insurance or back-up money, they were in trouble. Then Ray got a job as a laborer at Vista, a union job. The union's policy provides medical insurance for its employees after six months of working. Ray and Denise had found a miracle.

Working at Vista, a chemical plant involved in the hazardous production of plastics, gave Ray an opportunity to get an even better job, one that paid literally three times more. Vista gave him a test to become an operator, which he passed. "(After taking that job) we went from broke to upper-middle class almost overnight." But he didn't let this new job influence how he felt towards the poor. He got heavily involved with the union, eventually becoming a member of the Safety and Health Committee, and started researching something that made his stomach churn.

"Vista was built in the Sixties in a predominantly rural, black community named Mossville. Mossville, which is on the outskirts of Lake Charles, has been around for two centuries, in most instances, the same families on the same plots of land. These people were poor farmers, growing their own vegetables, raising their own livestock, living meagerly—but happily. When Vista moved in next door, they changed all this, drastically."

I sat still, waiting for him to continue.

"Vista uses very toxic materials to manufacture plastics. Some of them, like Ethylene Dichloride, are so poisonous that, one part per million, is proven to cause cancer. While working in the union, I found data on the number of abnormal births in Mossville, and the cancer rates that proved Vista had been leaking E.D.C into the area. Families that have literally died off, farms that have been crushed, cattle, chickens, dogs—all mutated from cancer. I felt so sick, because it wasn't just a one-time leak, it had been going on for years, and had been known about, but never acted upon."



Darcy Rain

A Gift With Love

A: Would you like a flower?

B: It's dead.

A: It's the thought that counts

B: The thought of giving me a dead flower?

A: Shut up. You know what I mean.

B: Nah, nah. . .explain it to me.

A: Well it's a gift from me to you to show I appreciate you.

B: but it's dead

A: so?

B: so does this mean our friendship has withered away. . .is it dead. . .is that what you're saying?

A: no. . .it's just a flower

B: ah, but a dead flower

A: (sigh) you're totally missing the point. It's a gift, regardless of its condition.

B: okay. So you would be happy if I gave you a gift no matter what it was?

A: well, yeah, if it's sincere

B: okay, well what if I sincerely take a shit in a paper bag and give it to you?

A: you're impossible (turns and starts to walk away)

B: (calling after A) what do you mean. That gift would be a part of me to you. (A exits and B smiles)

Shane Erath

Bound and tied and pasted into shape, lest
Tennos 155

Bound and tied and pasted into shape, lest
Around, about, and from Surrey awakes
its once-breathing Earl, companion of Thom;
Old Spaghetti Pete's darling love Laura
sits laughing, pleased, creativity 'venged;
Cold, dusty Willy, roll over good chap,
wake and behold this disgrace to your name!
We stole your Bible, it's twisted anew;
fake, plagiarized, miscarried piece of art,
Here's no summer's day or #18,
Donne resemble a Holy, or Yeats, or
Will's letters—or that of Eddy of Vere? —
done twisted, bent, and out of proportion,
still vaguely resembles your child of past.

Krista Parker

Someone Else's Eyes

everyday I go through life looking through someone else's
eyes
and people say we are our own worst critics
but when they are beating you down with limbs of harsh words
and buckets of
hateful tears
I can no longer find the beauty everybody talks about
then I wonder if it's all a dream since people tend to lie
about little things
and maybe they look through someone else's eyes too, just to
see themselves
outside the darkness of their own life
but when I feel the pain of my heart breaking because you
can't control your
anger
I see myself looking at my reflection in your eyes
and maybe that's why I keep looking at you



Missed.

by Max Shelton

The grey cold sky complemented the blank face Rick had chosen to wear. The familiar country road tried to soothe the mixture of sadness and anxiety that rolled wavelike inside him. Uneasiness had finally won out, because the destination and the reason for the trip had successfully warred among his worries and, it seemed, set themselves permanently in the forefront of his mind. With each passing second, the road's attempts to comfort took on a more ominous pretense. He began to see it for the trap that it was, but he was confident he would avoid its teeth. He knew that all traps could be safely sprung, and if he couldn't spring it then he would simply dodge the trap for another day. He hoped so, anyway.

He casually glanced over at his girlfriend Catherine sitting next to him staring desolately at the ground as it rushed by a water-speckled window. She was obviously upset with him. The way she was turned in the seat, with her back almost to him practically screamed it.

"Whatcha thinking?" he said in an attempt to cheer her.

"Trying not to." She didn't move. Her pale slender features reflected the image of a statue, which matched the shade of grey the world had chosen to wear. Today everything fit together just a little too well. Rick hated days like this, when the sky was all one color making almost everything around him seem the same. Even the cold wet weather fit just a little too perfectly. There was nothing unknown; he knew today and what it would hold. No one knew better than Rick what kind of solace could be found in unexpected events.

"I wonder what mom and dad have been up to?" Rick asked himself quietly.

"If you would keep in touch with them more often you would know. Wouldn't you?"

Rick feigned a look heavenward. "OK, what's wrong?" She didn't answer right away, she still hadn't moved. Rick had long ago observed that when motivated Catherine could freeze ice.

She finally turned in her seat, but she still seemed cold when she asked, "Why now Rick?"

"What are you talking about? I thought you wanted to meet my parents."

"I do, but we've been dating for three years. Why am I just now meeting them? Are you ashamed of me?"

"No, don't be childish."

"Are you ashamed of them?"

"No. Look drop it, OK, I don't want to get into an argument before we get there. Things are hard enough as is."

"I don't understand you. I couldn't go very long without talking to my parents, but you haven't spoken to yours since a year ago. I wouldn't have even known about that if I hadn't walked in on your phone conversation."

"Look, not everybody is as close to their parents as you are. I'm sorry if I disappoint you."

"Well, I don't know what to expect. You haven't told me anything about them, and I feel like I'm flying blind."

Rick chuckled. "Don't worry, babygirl, if I love you then they will too. I promise." Rick then reached squeezing her hand gently for support, and was rewarded when she gently laced her fingers with his. Rick loved her hands. He would sit and watch her hands move along a canvas when she painted, and marvel at the amount of gentleness and grace of each stroke. With that thought brought the realization that he didn't want to do this without her.

He didn't know when it had happened, but he was aware there was a moment of no return. It was like what his grandpa had told him; there was a moment when the knot cinched tight, and no matter what was to happen an essential part of him was tied to her. Rick smiled as they started to pass the familiar row of fence posts that surrounded his home. Grandpa had been right about a lot of things.

"Here we are."

Catherine turned her head to view a large one-story home facing the road with an aged oak tree growing right in front. The exterior was painted in a classic white, and the shingled roof rose slightly in the center to allow rain to run off at the front and back. The house was surrounded by an immense empty pasture that stretched back past two ponds and ended at what seemed a half a mile to an expanse of pine trees that was the back border. The ponds were sparsely surrounded by pines and oaks that were almost as large and as old as the one in front of the house. Due to the winter weather, the grass was a mixture of grey and brown, but she could easily imagine its grandeur in spring.

"This is gorgeous."

"Yes it is... . yes it is," Rick replied distantly.

Rick then pulled into a small driveway that seemed to make a wide horseshoe in the front yard, and parked to the right of the oak tree. They hurried out of the rain to the covered porch that extended across the width of the house. Catherine looked to find that there were five large rocking chairs spaced evenly facing the road. Two wind chimes that hung at the edge of the roof were making the wind's music, and from the center of the porch stretched an old concrete walkway that was cracked and uneven from the huge roots of the tree.

"Oh! There's my baby!" exclaimed a woman rushing down the steps to the front door.

"Hi, mom." Rick said as he wrapped his mother in a huge hug. Catherine noticed that Rick was still very tall compared to his

mother, and that lent a comical view to the embrace. Rick was stooped over while his mother was on tiptoes to reach him. Seeing how she barely came to his shoulder, Catherine was always self-conscious of that and why she never hugged him in public and only when she had suckered him into a chair.

"And you must be Catherine. My Rick has told me a lot about you." Rick's mother had disengaged from Rick and was in the process of giving her a hug as well.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you Mrs. Vines."

"Oh, don't worry about formalities; call me Evelyn." Catherine noticed that Evelyn was the same height as she with blue eyes and shoulder-length, dark, grey hair. Her features were round and gentle with lines at the corners of her mouth that gave the impression of easy smiles.

"Well let's get out of this chill air. Rick would you be a sweetheart and get the door?"

"Sure mom." Rick walked over and held the screen door open.

"Oh, it is so good to have my baby back home, but you need a hair cut." Evelyn said while going through the door.

"Yes mother." Rick couldn't help but notice the twitch in Catherine's eyebrow. She was obviously enjoying his new behavior.

"Why can't you be this way all the time?" she said while climbing the steps. She then let out a small gasp when Rick pinched her. Rick chuckled at her expression, which started at surprise, moved to mock anger, and then ended in one of her small smiles. He was definitely going to hear about this later.

Rick walked into the house and was greeted with the familiar sights and scents that were a part of his home. The living room hadn't changed since he moved out. The couch and two recliners still faced the TV in the back corner that was showing another Saints game. His father sat in a sprawling fashion in the closest recliner to the door, with his hands behind his head. The scent of his mother's cooking mingled with the sweet scent of burning wood in the fireplace. He easily picked out all the pictures in their gilded frames that rested on the TV, coffee table and mantle. The darkly stained wood paneled walls were a comforting sight, but the uneasiness again began to be felt. Rick did his best to ignore it.

"Who's winning pop?"

"Hey, boy! Sure as hell ain't the Saints. Did you make it in all right?"

"Yea, well enough considering the weather."

"Hey Ricky. How's it going?" Rick looked startled for a second when he heard his father's voice coming from the couch.

"Hey, Uncle Jimmy. I didn't see you there. Everything's OK, I guess." Rick replied with just a hint of uneasiness. He didn't think Jimmy would be here. Uncle Jimmy and his father were twins and despite the years they still looked very much alike. They both were tall with thick salt and pepper colored hair, and light blue

eyes. Rick noticed some differences though. Rick's father had owned a grocery store for the community until three years ago when he sold it. Jimmy was the preacher at Mt. Sinai Baptist Church. His father had always looked forward to retirement and the peace it would bring him. Jimmy was different.

His uncle's eyes were different from his father's in that they were just a bit brighter. People would jokingly remark that the reason why was because it was the light of the Lord shining through, but Rick knew what light burned in his eyes, and the Lord had nothing to do with it.

"Good. Who have you got with you?"

"This is Catherine. Catherine, this is my dad and this is my Uncle Jimmy."

"Hello, Mr. Vines." Catherine said twice with just a touch of nervousness.

"Ahhh, call me Dan," Rick's father said with his politician's grin.

"And call me Brother Jimmy, everyone does around here," Jimmy said with a grin of his own. Catherine nodded her understanding and looked to see Rick's face set briefly in a soft scowl aimed at Jimmy. In another second it was gone as he flashed her a reassuring smile. She meant to ask Rick quietly what was wrong, but right then his mother stepped in from the kitchen and announced dinner was ready.

Rick was all too happy to follow her into the kitchen. As soon as he walked in the warm rich smells of his mother's cooking washed over him. He looked around to find the kitchen also hadn't changed. The dark stained circular dining table was still there along with the myriad of woodcraft carvings that decorated every wall. Up against the wall that separated the living room and the kitchen stood a dark stained china cabinet. His grandpa had made that when Rick was younger. He wasn't allowed to help because he was too little to use the electric saws and other machines in his grandpa's shop, but he was there everyday watching it come to life. Up against the far wall was the sink with an open window that looked out onto a wide expanse of pasture. The stove was adjacent to the sink and stood next to a door that opened to the bedroom where his grandpa used to stay.

Rick sat down at the one of the sides of the table right across from Catherine. His mother sat next to her, while his uncle and his father sat at either end. The food was laid out with precision on a blue tablecloth. Rick looked up and shot Catherine a wink that she answered with a smile.

"Well, Jimmy why don't you say the blessing," said Rick's father.

Jimmy smiled. "All right."

All bowed their heads as Jimmy started the prayer. Even though he tried, Rick couldn't keep the frown off his face. The benediction sounded cold and rehearsed in his ears. When the prayer was over the meal began and so did the small talk. Food passed in a clockwise circle not missing anyone, while Jimmy asked his brother how he was handling retirement. Rick was only half listening. He was waiting for the moment when the spotlight would settle on him.

"How are things at college, Rick?"

"Things are going pretty good, Uncle Jimmy."

"How much longer do you have until you graduate?" his mother asked.

"Only one more semester, but I'm thinking of going on to get my Ph.D." Rick then noticed a slight change in the room. His mother was blinking and looking around the room. His father was blinking and looking around the room just a little bit more than usual, while his uncle unconsciously raised his eyebrows. His father and Catherine seemed to be oblivious. When she looked up at him, he gave her another wink.

"How is the work on the church coming?" asked Rick's father.

"Fine, fine. They should have that new speaker system put in by Friday."

"I heard you had a guest preacher coming this Sunday."

"Yeah, Brother Jerry Higgins. He's young but he can preach a real good sermon. Of course, I still don't think that he could beat Ricky."

"You can preach?" Catherine asked barely hiding her astonishment.

Jimmy spoke up before Rick could explain. "Oh yeah, Ricky asked me one time if he could preach during a revival we had back when he was eighteen. I put together the sermon, of course, but Ricky gave it that day. And man did he! I hadn't seen a revival get that worked up in a long time. He was a natural. I was hoping he would pursue it further in college, but he decided to pursue his other degree."

Catherine looked over to see that Rick's frown had returned and had focused on his food. "You never told me that," she stated with a surprised smile.

"Yeah, well it never really came up," Rick replied offhandedly. When it was apparent Rick didn't wish to go further the conversation shifted again. Soon the meal was over and Rick's mother began to move the dishes to the sink.

"Here, let me help you."

"Don't worry about it, Catherine, I've got it, besides, Rick will help me. Won't you Rick?"

"Sure mom." Rick looked around as he was helping his mother with the dishes and saw his father and Uncle Jimmy talking on the other side of the room, while Catherine was eyeing his grandpa's collection of books.

"Rick, we need to talk," his mother said softly almost conspiratorially.

"What about?"

"Your future, of course."

"Oh, that old song and dance, huh?"

Evelyn rolled her eyes up at her son and fixed her most stern stare at him. "You need to get serious about what you are going to do after college."

"I am. I want to teach."

"You can't live well off a teacher's salary. Not around here."

"I wasn't planning to live around here."

Evelyn stopped cold and fixed a surprised look on her son. "You're not going to live here? Who's going to take care of us when we get old?"

"I'm not planning on moving anywhere across the country. I just don't want to teach here. I'll be here for you when you need me."

"You still need to consider your uncle for...."

"Look I don't want to talk about this anymore. OK?" With that Rick dried his hands and with forced calm walked over to Catherine who was still admiring the collection of books.

"Hey babygirl. Having fun?"

She beamed one of her smiles at him and took his arm, as she was accustomed to do when speaking alone. "Whose books are these?"

"These were my grandpa's. Most of them are just cheesy western novels, but he did love to read."

"You sound like you miss him."

"I do very much. When we get home I'll tell you more about him."

She stroked his arm affectionately and said, "I'd like that." She then stopped and let go of Rick's arm as Rick's father came up to them.

"Catherine, Rick tells us you're a painter. Is that right?"

"Yes sir."

"My mother used to paint before she died. We built her an add on room in the house where she could. I think her paintings are still in there. Would you like to see them?"

"Ah yeah sure," she said while looking up at Rick.

Just then Jimmy came up to them and asked, "Tell me Ricky how are you liking college?"

Rick gave Catherine a reassuring smile. "Go ahead. I'll talk with Uncle Jimmy." He watched as his father led her through one of the doors in the back that led to what he knew was his grandma's painting room.

"Well it's going really well Uncle Jimmy."

"That's good. Look, Ricky, I've been meaning to talk to you. I was wondering if you would come help me in the church after you've graduated. Our congregation has gotten much bigger since you left and who knows maybe you could take over for me later."

"No, thanks," Rick replied levelly. His mood was getting darker by the second, and the fact that his mother stood at Jimmy's shoulder didn't help matters any.

"Son you need to take his offer."

"No, thanks,"

"Just think about it, Ricky. with my guidance you could really do something with yourself."

"I am."

Jimmy chuckled, "What are you going to do with your history degree? Besides you've been slipping away from the Lord ever since you moved out of the house anyway."

Rick's face then fell into a scowl that had all of its focus on Jimmy. "Hey, hey Ricky I know how things work these days, but you living with that girl and not being married is still immoral."

"Her name is Catherine, and you are the last person who should tell me what is moral and what is immoral."

"Rick! How can you say that?"

"My esteemed uncle here is not the upright man he has everybody believing. I caught him having sex in the church's meeting room and it wasn't with Aunt Tina."

"You hush Rick right this instant!" Rick's mom demanded.

Rick could see the anger in his uncle's face but he could also see the fear. He had wanted to throw him off his pedestal for so long. His uncle had betrayed him that day, betrayed his faith and his faith in his uncle.

"It was a couple of hours before the revival started. I walked in because I heard some noises coming from back there. I slowly opened the door and caught you in the middle of it. I couldn't see who the whore was because you were on the floor behind the table but I know it was you." Rick was enjoying twisting the knife. He had never spoken of it until now. He didn't want to be the person who had put division in the family, but he was tired of this game. His uncle and his mother had been planning his future his entire life, telling him that they knew better. He knew differently now.

"Shut up! That's a filthy lie!"

Rick's face screwed up into an incredulous look. "You believe him over me? Why would I lie about something like that?"

"I said shut up!"

"But... . ." Rick was cut off as his mother gave him a full arm slap. He was shocked as he looked back to see his mother's face red and full of anger, but that was not what shocked him. He also saw fear. Then it dawned on him that he was betrayed more than he knew. Anger grew inside him more until he felt he was possessed by it. He wanted to scream at his mother and tell his father what he knew. He wanted to rip his uncle's throat out. Long seconds passed as he simply stared at his mother with white-hot rage.

"What's going on here?" came his father's voice behind him. Instantly he cooled. He couldn't put his finger on the reason but it was there.

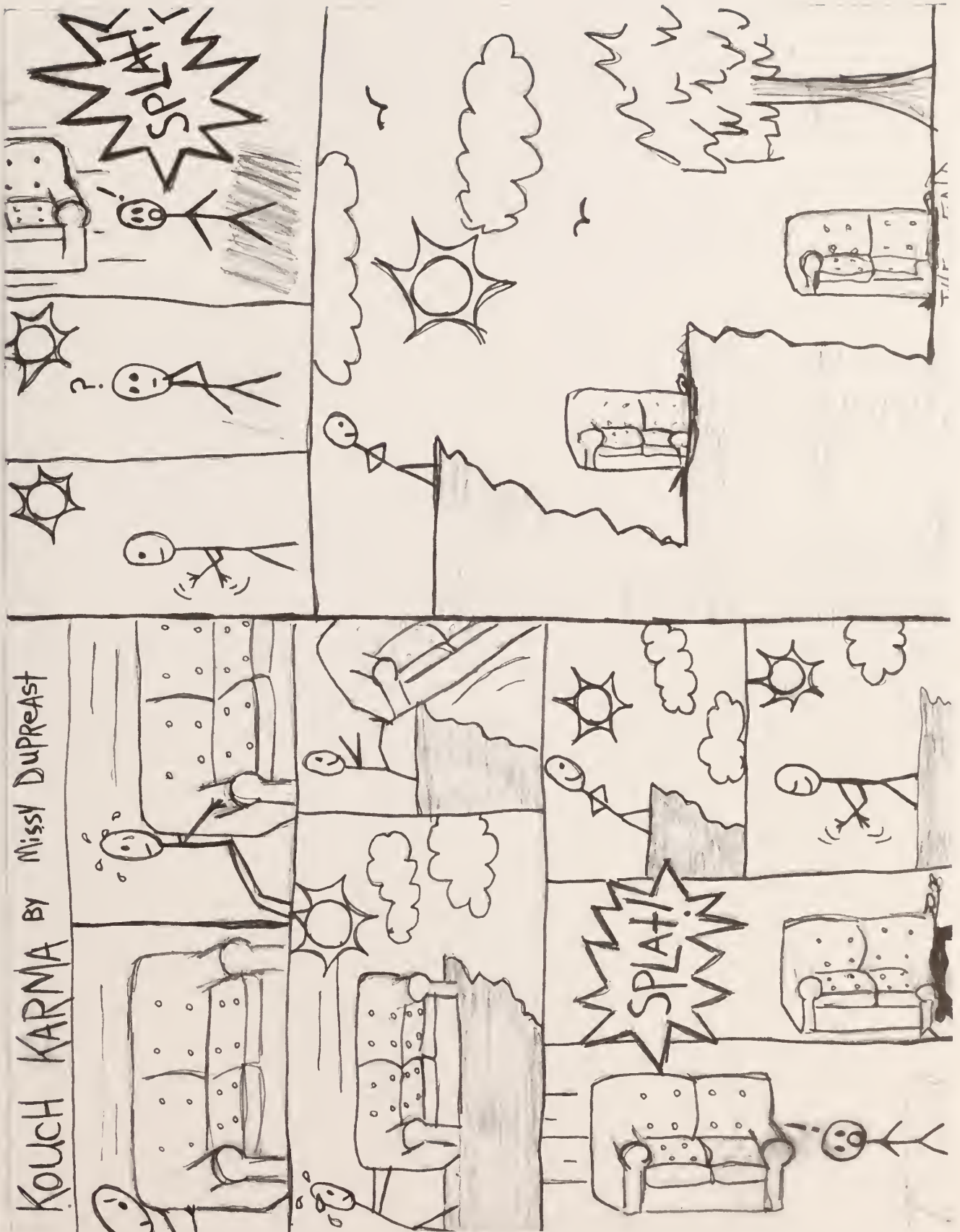
"Nothing. Let's go Catherine," Rick said softly. She said nothing as she walked behind him heading for the door. He didn't have time to explain things he didn't have to right away. One of the many reasons she was one of the few people he put faith in.

"If you leave you won't ever come back." His mother's voice sounded strained and unnatural, but he didn't stop. As he began to leave out he looked around and felt the pull of home even more, but as he passed through door the pulling stopped. Rick pretended not to notice and went straight for the car.

The road and the weather looked much the same, as when he left earlier that day, but earlier today he had a family; now he wasn't so sure. Catherine sat leaned her head on his shoulder and started

stroking his hand. Uncertainty weighed heavily on his mind. His grandpa had told him that ties were formed between people that no matter what happened they could never be cut. He believed in those words. His grandpa was living proof they were true. Rick believed him as much as he believed what he did was right, but still fear and emptiness kept coloring his thoughts. Rick drove the rest of the way in a mournful silence. He knew that today he would avoid the trap; he just didn't realize that in the end it would avoid him.

KOUCH KARMA BY MISSY DUPREAST



Maryann Vidos

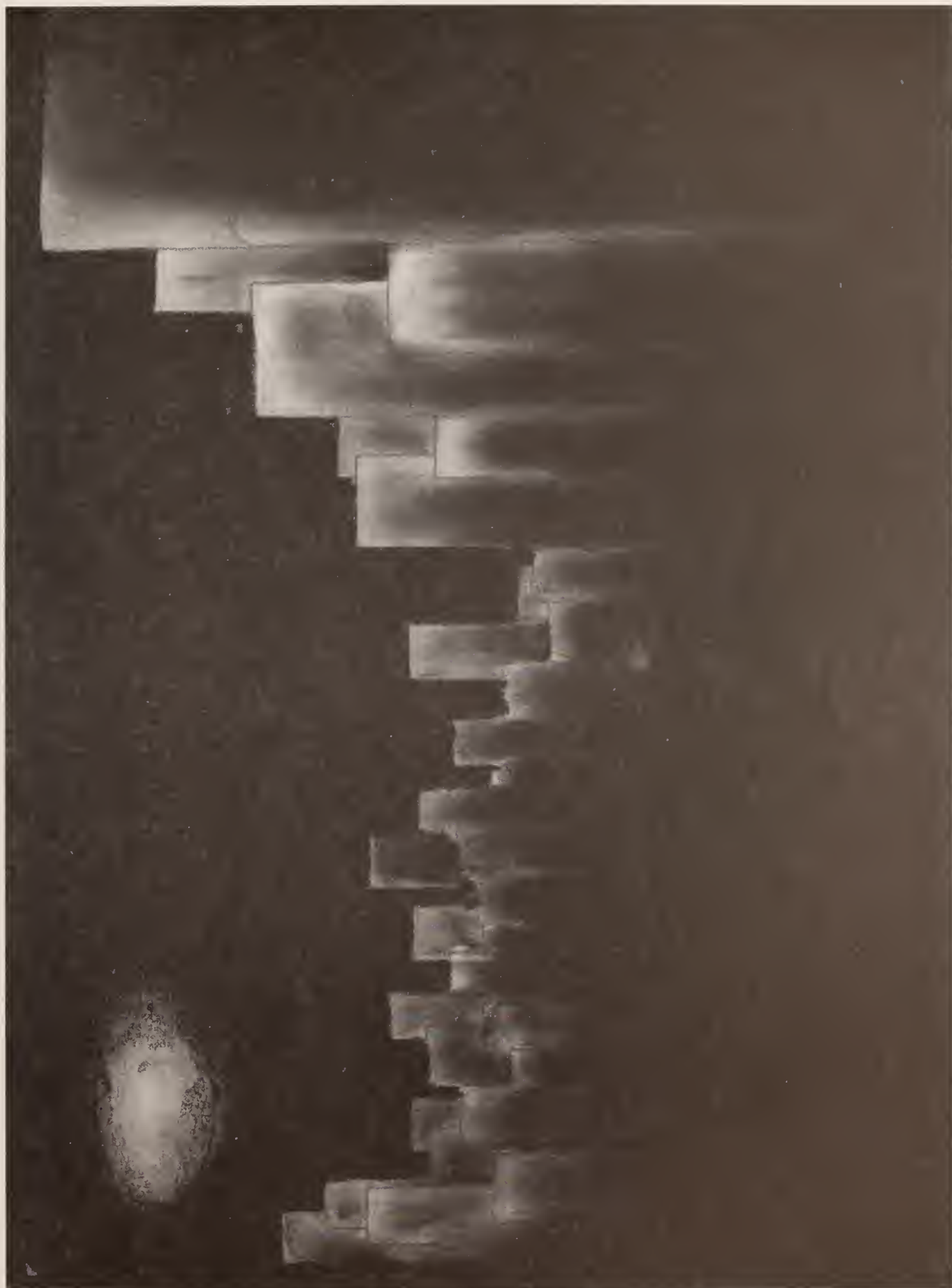
Away From Here

The hole that waits for me in the end
Never seems to be far from my mind.
As I lie here waiting for him to send me
To a place that everyone will find.

He calls out and waits for me to answer
The words that he is speaking to me.
His voice will forever ring in my ears
words that will be bound to set me free

Out of this world with nothing to lose
Why go through life when it is unfair?
He gave a choice and I had to choose
No longer living where no one cares.

A life God decided to take away
It would be worse if here I chose to stay.



Half Pint

Chicken Burgher

Scene: Gloomy summer day in western country of Pennsylvania, 1794. It is just before noon, and Henry Burgher, age 21, is in a stockade, center stage. Passers-by stare and move along as they whisper to each other.

A woman passer-by: (to another woman). . .he always was a rambunctious fellow. . . (the woman nods and their voices fade as they move along.)

A gentleman passer-by: (standing with a group of two other men). . .if the boy would've just done what he was told. . .

A worker: (to a fellow worker). . .I heard he kill't somebody. . .

Passers-by continue to point and whisper about Henry.

Henry: Look!. . .go ahead. . .that's what you're supposed to do. That's it. . .stare. . .whisper. (louder, and proudly) I, ladies and gentlemen, will be your entertainment today. I have been put here in this contraption...bound quite tightly, as you can see. . .I am a display! You see me here, now. . .but soon. . .before your very eyes. . .I will be magically transformed into a chicken! Yes, that's it folks, a chicken. So don't miss out. Fun family entertainment. . .today only!
(Sings)
Chickens cry and chickens dance

'Cause tar was poured into their pants
They have feathers but cannot fly
Poor, poor chicken, don't you cry
The burns and blisters will soon be gone
And you will sleep, forever on.

Passers-by are disgusted with his making light
of such a situation, and continue to move
along and whisper.

Henry: (frustrated by the lack of attention,
begins to cluck loudly like a chicken)
A man by the name of Mr. Thornton enters the
stage carrying one piece of bread on a plate
and a glass of water. He walks briskly up to
Henry.

Mr. Thornton: Henry. . . calm yourself! What
are you trying to do?

Henry: Oh, hello Mr. Thornton, sir, I was just
singing a song for the nice people who
have come to see me today.

Mr. Thornton: Well, you need to settle down. .
.you're frightening the townspeople. .
.now, I have some things to tell you. (he
sets the plate and the glass on the ground
in front of Henry and forgets about them.
Henry reaches his fingers longingly to-
wards the food, but it is impossible to
reach.)

I talked with the doctor this morning. .
. (looking down at the ground and pauses)
he's dead, Henry. . . he died last night.
(He looks back at Henry for some sort of
reaction, but Henry is silent.)

Do you have nothing to say?

(Henry flops his hands. . .his only gesture equivalent to a shrug.)

You killed a man, Henry. . .what on earth were you thinking?!

Henry: What was I thinking?. . .I'll tell you what I was thinking. . .those bastards are taking everything I work for. . .If I didn't stand up and do something. . .my whole family would wind up dead. I'm not rich. I work hard. . .I work damn hard trying to tend to the grain. That liquor tax is killing my family. Did you know that to transport my grain to the market, my pack horse can carry twenty-four bushels of rye. . .but only if it is concentrated in its whiskey form! Do you know how many bushels of unprocessed rye he can carry? Two. Just two. How many trips to the market do you think I can make? And I sure as hell can't afford the goddamn whiskey tax.

Mr. Thornton: Now, Henry, you watch your mouth.

Henry: It's all about the money to you folks. . .all I want to do is run my farm and have enough to get by.

Mr. Thornton: (Sternly) You don't have to kill somebody to do it.

Henry: Nobody would listen to me if I didn't.

Mr. Thornton: (frustrated) That tax collector was just doing his job. There was no need for such behavior.

Henry: He was trying to rob me!

Mr. Thornton: Henry, this is absurd. I will no

longer listen to this nonsense! (pauses)
Don't you realize that you are going to be
tarred and feathered for this?

Henry: (proudly) Yes, sir

Mr. Thornton: (Sighs) The guards will be here
within an hour. . .may God have mercy on
you, dear boy. (Turns around and walks
off-stage quickly)

Henry: (calls after Mr. Thornton) Wait!. .
.the bread!. . . (reaches for the bread,
but it's hopeless. He grunts in frustra-
tion)

Henry: (proudly, to the audience) I am not
afraid! Lots of men die proudly for their
countries, and I will die just as proudly
for standing up for my own rights! So, you
all go ahead and turn your noses up at me.
. .go ahead and obey all the rules at the
expense of your own well-being. I chose
not to. . .I chose to defend myself, and
other farmers like myself, against this
deplorable whiskey tax. I am a hero! No
one else was brave enough. . .I may be the
one in the outfit, but you. . .you all
are the chickens!

People continue to walk by, avoiding eye con-
tact with Henry, but mumbling to them-
selves. Henry looks around and occasion-
ally reaches his fingers towards the
bread. Enter the reverend.

Reverend: Good afternoon, Mr. Burgher.

Henry: Is it afternoon already?

Reverend: Yes it is.

Henry: Soon, huh?

Reverend: Yes it will be soon. . .let us pray.
. .(bows his head and closes his eyes)

Henry:. . .wait. . .can you. . .

Reverend: (loudly) Dear gracious Lord. . . .

Henry:. . .the bread. . . (reaching for the
bread)

Reverend: We ask that you pour your grace and
your mercy down on Henry. . .

Henry: (sighs again at the unattainable bread
and lets his head hang down)

Reverend: We ask that you forgive him of this
terrible deed that he has committed. . .

Henry: (not very enthusiastically) Yes, Lord.

Reverend: He will be punished on earth accord-
ing to your will. . .an eye for an eye, a
tooth for a tooth. . .

Henry: tar and feathers

Reverend: (Out of the corner of his eye, he
looks at Henry, annoyed by his behavior during
prayer) Forgive him, oh Lord, and let him pass
into the pearly gates of heaven where he can
serve you, our precious Father, for all of
eternity.

Henry: (reaches for the bread again) And give
us this day our daily bread!

Reverend: In the name of the Father, the Son,
and the Holy Spirit. . .Amen.

Henry: Amen. (makes the sign of the cross with
his index finger, since that's the best he can
do)

The reverend looks up at Henry and sighs. A bell tolls off-stage as two guards enter.
Reverend: It is time, Henry. (pause) God bless you. (He turns around and walks off stage)
Henry: (calls after the reverend) the bread. .
.can I have the. . .

The two guards approach Henry, one on each side of him. They take him out of the stockade and begin to escort him off-stage. About of the way there, Henry jerks himself free and runs back to the plate. He grabs the piece of bread, takes a big bite, and walks with the guards off-stage.

I blink my eyes, and I blink again. The painful strain at the back of them causes tears to creep down my cheeks sideways to my ears. My eyelashes cling to one another as I squint. I think I'm looking around; I know I'm searching for some hint of light. My brain is being deceived. I can no longer tell if my eyes are open or shut. The only light is illusionary: the bright bursts of fireworks on a black backdrop that the eyes see when they are too strained. My breathing quickens as my stomach contracts in panic. The stale, static air is deathly still; there is no breeze, no draft. The only sounds I can detect are my own breathing and heartbeat, pounding against my breastbone; however, I slowly become aware of one additional sound. I can hear the now deafening snap and rasp of my eyelashes across my cheeks with each blink of my eyes.

I roll my head sideways on its soft cushion, and my cheek is greeted by the cool slippery kiss of soft fabric. My questing fingers slide along the surface beneath me, discovering the whispering satin that is so fine that my rough hands catch its smooth layers and tug them into disarray. As my hands venture farther from my body, they encounter walls pressing in on both sides of my body. My gasp finally stirs the stifling air around me, and I feel it bounce back into my face. Sweat trickles from my temples to my ears. As I bite my lip, bitter salt mixes with the iron-dry desert in my mouth.

With eyes wide, searching for any shape in the oblivion around me, my hands creep up above my chest. A muffled thump sounds once as my hands collide with the surface above me, and then louder thumps sound as I frantically struggle against my black prison. I go limp, exhausted. My pulse roaring in my ears slowly begins to subside.

One final noise plunges through the dark to shred my sanity: a scattered, rhythmic *clump, patter*. For an instant, the sound reminds me of sleeping in my family's motor home while the rain staccatos on the roof. The difference registers; it isn't water, but earth that drums the top of my box-prison.

The roaring in my ears floods back, an ebony tidal wave rushing and crashing over my mind and soul, obliterating my reality.

Tee-up and Duck
by Pete Manchester

Tee-box one, muffed to the right;
Second shot made the shaft shimmy,
Third shot landed short,
Fourth shot, fifth shot, sixth shot, finally in the hole.

Tee-box two, ball hit fat;
Ricocheting along the cart path,
Second shot lifted up and moved over,
Oh praise the winter rules,
A four putt to the hole,
Cursing putter, ball, course maintenance, and the golfing deities.

Tee-box three, missed the ball;
Cursing some more,
Loosing my head, slinging my club,
Hitting a squirrel which skittered away,
Getting more pissed off, walking on down the course.

Tee-box four, I give it one last try;
The shot flies high and true, if but only momentarily,
A slice to the right, far right, ends its reign,
A resounding klunk off a towering pine,
Ball launched back across fairway,
To a pinball machine of pines,
Careening from tree to eeing tree,
Flung back at me,
Missing my mortal body by inches,
Looking up thinking I might need cover fire,
Maybe today is not a good day to golf.

The Price of Shoes

To this day, I have trouble understanding how a certain group of self-righteous and condescending people can be so superficial. It is utterly amazing to see this race become so conceited and numb to other people's feelings that they refuse to even consider speaking to another individual unless they can smell the disgusting stench of the all-knowing dollar. Members of cliques spend their entire lives with perfectly tanned noses egotistically raised at those who do not wear the latest fashion, have the perfect hair, or a flawless smile. Day after day, they walk right past the quiet, humble, but most often intellectual types, refusing to acknowledge their very existence. But let these same "invisible" people suddenly show up with a new designer look, a smaller waist, or the smell of money and these "privileged" will flock to them like flies to a fresh piece of meat. This is how my story begins. A group of these elite, life-sucking animals became the predators and I, voluntarily, became the prey.

It all began in one of the most unlikely of places; a church. I was sitting patiently waiting for the Wednesday night service to begin when the flies began to swarm around me. As the rest of the congregation rose to pray, out of the corner of my eye I saw four of the most popular and elite girls in my hometown slowly inching down the pew where I was seated. I had known these girls my entire life, and until about three years prior to this event, had been friends with them. Soon, they surrounded me dressed in the latest designer shirts and tight, silky, dangerously heightened skirts. The potent smell of their chic perfumes mixing in the air almost drove me to tears. The thought of "what do they want" raced through my mind as fake hugs flowed from their arms like water down a waterfall. When the service finally ended, I desperately tried to break out of the cage of happiness that these girls had constructed with their seemingly perfect bodies. "It's been so long since I've seen you, Tiffany. How have you been, girl? I'm so glad to see you." These words flew from their mouths like bacteria springing from a virus trying to infect my ears. It was the most disgusting display of human communication I had ever heard.

Just as I was about to tell all of these beauty queen drop-outs what they needed to do, Misty, the leader of this curling-iron army, exclaimed, "Oh, Tiffany. I absolutely love those shoes! Where on earth did you get them? I've been looking everywhere for them." In that moment, I realized why these four hairspray addicts wanted to speak to me. They wanted to be seen

with someone who owned a pair of the latest shoes! For the first time in my life, I was speechless. Being the quick thinker that I consider myself to be, however, I decided to go along with this insanity to see just how shallow these people actually were.

"Oh, these things! Girl, I picked these up in a shoe store in New Orleans," I said in the most snobbish and superficial tone I could stomach. At their nauseating squeal of delight, I was unanimously accepted into this group of self-righteous, egotistical worms. We chatted for another fifteen minutes before leaving for home.

As my mother heated up a bowl of homemade vegetable soup, I excitedly told her what had happened at church that evening and how I had handled the peculiar situation. She laughed hysterically as she pictured the look on my face as the smell of their million dollar perfumes filled my lungs. She did, however, have one question for me, "Are you going to tell the girls where your shoes really came from?"

"No way," I protested loudly, "they think that I got these shoes from a shop in New Orleans when I really got them out of a box of hand-me-downs!" My mother and I could no longer contain ourselves; we hysterically burst into laughter until tears of joy streamed down our beet red faces. We both agreed with the idea of me going along with these self-indulgent snobs to see just how pathetically materialistic they were. I was given one piece of advice: do not hurt anyone's feelings and try not to be hurt by anyone.

The following day at school was complete insanity. Everywhere I went people who had the day before ignored me like I was no more important than the paint on the walls were acting as though I was a long lost friend who had magically stepped back into their lives. The girls stuck to me like peanut butter to the roof of a dog's mouth. They passed me notes in class insisting I sit with them at lunch, and continually informed me about the imperfections of the rest of the people attending school that day. My genuine friends enjoyed seeing me in obvious torment so much that they spent the day laughing and loudly pointing out how good my new fashionably minded friends "looked on me." They had all come to the conclusion that I had been hit in the head with a Gucci purse or Tommy Hilfiger perfume bottle.

By the end of a day filled with the constant whining of "why my daddy won't buy me a new car" and "what's with that girl's hair," I came to the conclusion that this world of superficial bimbos, with perfect hair and teeth so white they could blind a person, was not worth my time and effort. That same afternoon, I took the pair of friend buying, attention taking, hand-me-down shoes off and placed them in a small box in the back of my closet.

I returned to school that Friday morning wearing the same pair of old, familiar, comfortable tennis shoes that I had worn the week before. To my content, the same revolting, life-sucking people who had so energetically greeted me the day before passed on by without so much as a nod of existence. To them I had faded back into the unending sea of the fashionably weak-minded.

I still have that pair of designer shoes in the back of my closet. I take them out of their worn box and think about my experience as meat for the flies of sophistication and popularity. These people pretend to be a friend when in actuality they are more disgusted with the rest of the world's less privileged than themselves. They feed off the stench of money and popularity. It is a shame that this community of the "privileged" only have a need for money as a replacement for the desire of true friendship and compassion. I have never told any of the four aristocratically-challenged girls that the shoes they so adamantly praised and adored came from a box of hand-me-downs instead of a New Orleans shop.

Ashley Knott

Where I'm From

I'm from an old country home with old country values.
From the old wood burning stove in the corner
And the giant brown chair I'd crawl into with Grandma.
I'm the big yellow room I'd play in for hours.
I'm from the white teddy bear I couldn't sleep without.
I'm from Barbie dolls and Candyland.
From the magical field of honey suckles and buttercups
Of blackberries, castles, gallant knights, and queens.
I'm from mud pies, black paint, and burning hot coffee.
I'm from "black chicken gumbo," boiled crawfish and crabs.
I'm from cupcakes and pancakes and chocolate fudge brownies.
I'm from Sheba, my live baby doll that resembled a poodle.
I'm the little gray mouse we found in the field.
I'm the strong vibrant lady my Grandma once was,
And the kind old man who gave me peppermints and hugs.
I'm the willful lady, who gave me my life,
And the man who helped raise me,
Though he didn't have to at all.
I'm from Sunset, Grand Coteau, and Mire all rolled into one,
Along with all the other small towns my family came from.
I'm the uncle that died before I was born
Who was only eight-teen on that summer morn.
I'm from feasts on Thanksgiving,
And candy canes on Christmas.
I'm the pictures collected in decorated shoeboxes.
I'm from nothing and everything,
But most of all. . . from me.

(scene: four thirteen year old kids from left to right: Billy, Daniel, Lyla, and Mikey sit in a semi-circle in Billy's backyard. they sit on stumps and logs playing uno on a wooden crate. it is summer.)

Billy: (throws down card) draw four, motherfucker. heheheyellow.

Daniel: damn it! (draws four cards)

Billy: uno karma, baby.

Mikey: what's that?

Billy: uno karma? It's likepayback. if you do something to fuck with somebody, it's gonna come around to bite you in the ass

Daniel: man, I ain't done shit to you this entire game.

Billy: ahhhh, but you chose to sit next to me. that's your bad.

Daniel: man, that's not uno karma

Billy: whatever

Mikey: hey, don't witches believe in that shit? Uh. . .threefold or something, right?

Billy: yeah, yeah, you got it

Lyla: okay, okay. . .I think I got this shit figured out. here you go, Daniel (puts down a card). . .reverse.

Daniel: (smiles) draw two, mr. uno karma

Billy: awww shit. you got me this time. I guess I'll have to draw two cards. (reaches for the deck and stops) NOT!
(throws down another draw two and looks at mikey) YOU draw FOUR.

Mikey: I don't think so. . .(puts down card and looks at lyla) draw six.

Lyla: shit.

Billy: (jumps up) HAHAHAHA now that's uno karma!

Lyla: shut up

Billy: I don't shut up. I grow up and when I look

Daniel: hey, fuck up. . .it's your turn.

Billy: oh (sits back down and plays)
(the game continues as they talk)

Mikey: hey, Billy. . .where are your parents?

Billy: inside. . .why?

Daniel: he has the hots for your mom. hehehe

Mikey: fuck you. . .I do not

Lyla: really, mikey? that's gross

Mikey: screw you guys. ya'll are sick. . .now,

Billy. . .really, are they busy?

Billy: I don't know (plays card). . .blue

Mikey: do you think they might come out here?

Billy: why do you want my parents to come out here?

Mikey: no. . .I don't want them to come out here. . .I want to make sure they stay in there.

Lyla: Uno!

Billy: shit!

Daniel: what are you talking about?

Mikey: just. . .(sigh). . .do you think they'll come out here?

Billy: no. . .they don't have any reason to

Mikey: cool. . .check this out (pulls a cigarette out of his pocket)

Daniel: whoa! a cigarette?!

Lyla: how'd you get that?

Mikey: I took it from my mom's pack. I only took one because I didn't want her to notice. I figured we could share, you know?

Billy: hell yeah, light it up.

Mikey: (face droops) shit! do any of you guys have a lighter?

Billy: damn it, mikey

Mikey: well, I forgot
(Daniel shakes his head and laughs and lyla giggles)

Billy: okay. . .I'll go inside to get something to drink and I'll try to grab some matches.

Mikey: cool, cool

Billy: it's your turn (points to Mikey)don't let her win
(exit Billy)

Mikey: (snapping back to the game) oh yeah. . .(looks at cards and plays). . .skip

Lyla: (grunts, then curiously) I've never smoked a cigarette before

Mikey: ah. . .it's cool. I don't do it a lot. . .just every now and then when mom leaves 'em lying around

Lyla: what's it like?

Daniel: what's it like? uh. . .well (plays a card) I don't know how to describe it. . .you're inhaling smoke into your lungs

Lyla: that sounds gross

Mikey: oh, it's easy. . .(demonstrates with the unlit cigarette) you take it like this, and you suck on it. when your mouth gets full of smoke, you breathe in. then you blow it out. Have you done this before, Daniel?

Daniel: just once. . .my sister let me have a drag off one of hers one time.

Mikey: cool. . .this'll be fun (looks at Lyla) you cool?

Lyla: (smiles and nods) uh-huh

Mikey: cool. . .here comes our man now
(enter Billy with a glass of water.)

Mikey: (holds cigarette up to his mouth and sings) come on baby light my fire

Billy: man, my mom was in the kitchen. I couldn't get 'em.

Daniel: (sigh) now what are we gonna do?
(short pause)
Lyla: we can wait for a little while and try again
Mikey: she can't stay in the kitchen forever
(short pause)
Billy: cool. . . (picks up cards). . . whose turn is it?
(everyone picks up their cards)
Daniel: (points to Billy) I think it's your go.
Billy: cool. . . hey, Lyla, you still got uno?
(Lyla nods and holds up her one card)
Billy: all right, Mikey, you gotta help me out here. . . hmmm. .
.let's see if she has red (puts down a card)
Mikey: thanks a lot Billy (draws cards until) HA! Draw Four. .
.blue
Lyla: Damn it! (draws four cards and game continues)
Billy: hey. . . who's gonna go in this time?
Daniel: huh?
Billy: who's gonna go get the matches?
Mikey: you're not gonna do it?
Billy: I went already. if I go in again, my mom will think
something's up.
Daniel: it's your house. . . we don't know where to look for
matches. what if your parents come in while one of us is all
digging through cabinets and shit?
Billy: nah, look (sets down his cards) when you go in the
kitchen, look in the drawer to the right of the sink. they
should be right there.
Lyla: I'm not going
Billy: all you have to do is go to the bathroom. that way you
can scope things out. if the coast is clear, grab the
matches from the kitchen on your way out. it's that easy.
Daniel: if it's so easy, then why don't you go?
Billy: I told you, shithead. I already went.
Mikey: man, I don't want to go.
Daniel: me neither
Billy: man, don't be such pussies. do ya'll want to do this or
not? come on. . . do paper, rock, scissors or something.
(Daniel, Lyla, and Mikey look at each other and nod)
Mikey: loser goes
(everyone nods, puts down their cards, and sits up)
Daniel, Lyla, and Mikey: one, two, three (lights down on three)
(lights up, Lyla is coughing harshly)
Billy: shh. . . keep it down will you? (hands her the glass of
water)
(Daniel puts one hand on Lyla's back and takes the cigarette
with his other hand. He takes a drag and tries to hold back a
cough, but fails)

Billy: damn you guys. . .can you be a little bit more obvious?
(takes the cigarette)
Daniel: what's that?
Lyla: (looks around) what?
Daniel: did you hear that?
Mikey: I didn't hear anything (takes cigarette from Billy. Billy coughs)
Lyla: you mean Billy coughing? Keep it down, Billy. (smirks)
Billy: fuck you
Daniel: no, man. . . I thought I heard something
Mikey: what is it?
Daniel: I don't know (looks around)
(Mikey passes cigarette to Lyla and she takes a drag)
Billy: hey, are we gonna keep playing this game?
Daniel: wait! . . .Billy, it's your little brother
Billy: shit!
(they frantically put out the cigarette and hide it under one of the logs. They all grab their cards and Lyla is coughing)
Billy: (under his breath to Lyla) cool it.
(Daniel hands her the glass of water. Enter Bug, a boy of about 6 years. He's dirty from playing outside and is carrying a toy truck)
Bug: vroom! Vroom! (pushes truck around Billy)
Billy: go away, Bug
Bug: don't call me that . . .i'll tell mom
Billy: sooo-rry
Bug: whatcha doin'?
Billy: we're playing uno
Bug: I wanna play
Billy: no . . . go away
Lyla: this is a game for big kids
Bug: but I know how to play . . . I played it before with . . .
Mikey: we play it different
Bug: hurmph! (plays with his toy truck) what's that smell?
Lyla: (nervously) uhh . . . what smell?
Bug: I dunno. That smell . . . something stinks
Billy: oh, that's Lyla (laughs) don't you know that girls stink
Mikey: (laughs) yeah. . .it's their cooties
Lyla: fff (growls)
Bug: (giggles) Lyla has cooties! Lyla has cooties!
Lyla: man, see what ya'll have started.
Mikey: (laughing) well?
Billy: we had to say something. . .(to Bug) hey, what's mom doing?
Bug: (plays with truck) I dunno.
Billy: why don't you go find out.
Bug: I don't want to.

Billy: pleeeeeeeze
Bug: ughhhnnn
Daniel: hey, Bug
Bug: don't call me that!
Daniel: sorry, sorry. . .so. . .what do you think is on TV?
Billy: pssst. . .man, our TV is broken.
Daniel: huh. . .I'm trying, man
Lyla: hey. . .listen. . .is that the ice cream truck?
(Bug drops his truck and runs off stage)
Billy: very impressive
Lyla: you guys owe me
Mikey: psshhh
Daniel: that was close. I thought we were busted
Billy: by Bug?
Daniel: well, he smelled the cigarette
Billy: so?
Daniel: he could've told on us
Mikey: we're cool
Lyla: do we smell?
Mikey: you do (group laughs)
Lyla: really, though. . .do we smell like smoke?
Daniel: man. . .I don't know. . .do we?
Mikey: shit, Lyla, you're a girl. . .don't you have perfume or something?
Billy: perfume? Are you serious? You want us to put on perfume?
Mikey: it was just an idea
Billy: not a very good one
Mikey: fuck off
Daniel: (sarcastically) or we could just roll around in a patch of flowers
Billy: man, forget it. . .let's finish playing. We're cool
Lyla: I'm tired of playing
Daniel: yeah, me too
Billy: man, screw you guys. Mikey?
Mikey: sorry Billy
Billy: fine. . .I win.
Mikey: whatever (they begin to pick up the cards)
(enter Bug pouting)
Bug: there was no ice cream truck!
Lyla: really? I thought I heard it. I guess I was wrong.
Mikey: obviously (grins)
(Bug pulls a pack of gum out of his pocket and gets himself a piece)
Daniel: whatcha got there?
Bug: gum
Daniel: oh yeah? (looks at everyone else and smiles) do you think I could have a piece?

Mikey: yeah. . .and us too?

Bug: it's mine

Lyla: pleeeze

Billy: don't make me tell mom that you're not sharing

Bug: hurmph. (gives them each a piece of gum)

Mikey: thanks, kid

Billy: (grins) we're cool.

(lights down)

Suburban Love

Two lovers, in warm embrace;
The Lady smiled, he kissed her face.
Tangled sheets, sweat-damp hair;
red tint to her complexion fair.

The hermaphroditic light,
not day but not yet night
warm, gray, entwined,
the light and dark combined.

She slept, he did not.
He could not bear the thought;
Wrapped in sheets, a perverse glove;
'twas then he realized, he was in love.

Then She woke, it was the light
shining through the windows bright.
She turned to him, to his dismay
And declared, "I want my pay."

Shane Erath

